

John N. A. Griswold House, The  
Art Association of Newport  
76 Bellevue Avenue, at the south-  
east corner of Old Beach Road  
Newport  
Newport County  
Rhode Island

HABS No. RI-322

HABS  
RI,  
3-NEWP,  
36-

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20240

ADDENDUM  
FOLLOWS...

## JOHN N.A. GRISWOLD HOUSE, THE ART ASSOCIATION OF NEWPORT

HABS  
RI,  
3-NEWP,  
36-

Location: 76 Bellevue Avenue, at the southeast corner of  
Old Beach Road.

Present Owner: The Art Association of Newport.

Present Occupants: The Art Association of Newport.

Present Use: Art Gallery.

Statement of  
Significance: This an early and key example of a major style  
of domestic architecture in America in the second  
half of the 19th century. It is characterized by  
open planning, irregular and picturesque massing,  
deep porches, and richly articulated wall surfaces  
with bracketing and half-timber patterning.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

## A. Physical History:

## 1. Original and subsequent owners:

This building is located in Plat 26, Lot 40. The following  
is an incomplete chain of title from Newport City Clerk's  
Records for the city of Newport. Reference is to number  
and volume of the Land Evidence Books, (LEB.--, p.--).

1862 Deed of November 25, 1862, recorded in LEB. 36, pp.  
616-618.

From: Rowland R. Hazard, Jr. and Margaret E. Hazard  
To: John N.A. Griswold

"... for \$18,000 and further payment of a certain  
mortgage to the Savings Bank of Newport of \$4,000,  
made by Mary E. Rhodes, dated 31st January 1859, and  
recorded in Volume 2 of mortgages, pages 483 to 485,  
also a mortgage to said Savings Bank, for \$6,000, made  
by the grantors, dated May 1st 1861, and recorded in  
the 3rd volume of mortgages, pages 205 to 206; said  
sums making together Twenty Eight Thousand Dollars...  
All that certain tract or parcel of land situated in  
said Newport, bounded as follows, viz: Northerly on  
Beach St.; Easterly on State St.; Southerly on Downing

St.; and Westerly on South Touro St. [Bellevue Avenue]. Being the 'Fry Estate' and 'Shaw Estate', so called, together with all the buildings and improvements thereon standing; and also all the furniture in the house, which belongs to the grantors excepting the pictures, a piano, and six antique chairs, reserving to these grantors the right to remove the articles so reserved, at any time during the month of May, 1863..."

1863 Deed of April 29, 1863, recorded in LEB. 37, pp. 271-272.

From: Robert Hallowell Gardiner, Jr. and Sarah Fenwick  
To: William H. King

The sale of this property, "Kingscote" (RI-307), was subject to a lease to John N.A. Griswold which expired May 1, 1864. Presumably the termination date of the lease indicates that Griswold expected to move into his new house by May 1, 1864.

1915 Deed of November 11, 1915, recorded in LEB. 102, p. 172.

From: Trustees of the J.N.A. Griswold Estate  
To: The Art Association of Newport  
For: \$40,000

"... certain piece of land with buildings,... the same premises conveyed by Rowland R. Hazard, Jr. and Margaret E. Hazard, his wife, to John N.A. Griswold, by deed dated November 25, 1862."

2. Date of erection: October, 1863 to May, 1864.
3. Architect: Richard Morris Hunt
4. Builder or contractor: Cranston and Burdick
5. Original plans: None known.
6. Alterations and additions: In 1920, the large rear gallery was added to the east side of the house. The architect was Mr. Samuel Prescott Hall. The gallery, originally the stables of the estate, had been previously modified for studio space.
7. Important old views: There are several published photographs of the exterior in an article by Montgomery Schuyler,

"The Architectural Works of the Late Richard M. Hunt".  
The Newport Historical Society has several interior photographs of early exhibitions.

B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure:

The original owner and builder, John N.A. Griswold, was recognized as a leading financier. One-time president of the Illinois Central Railroad, he was prominent in national railroad circles until the 1890's. He served as the United States Consul to Shanghai from 1848 to 1854. In 1863, he settled in Newport and was extremely active in city improvements, real estate, and land development.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Records of Deeds in the Newport City Hall.

Howland, Catherine Clinton. The Richard Morris Hunt Papers. Edited by Alan Burnham. Unpublished manuscript in the American Architectural Archive.

Hunter, Kate. The Journal of Kate Hunter. Vol. 2, 1863. Unpublished manuscript in Vault A of the Newport Historical Society.

2. Secondary and published sources:

Downing, Antoinette F., and Scully, Vincent J., Jr. The Architectural Heritage of Newport, Rhode Island. New York: Clarkson N. Potter, second edition, 1967.

Howe, Bruce. "Early Days of the Art Association." Bulletin of the Newport Historical Society, 110 (April, 1963), 5-29.

Newport Mercury. January 3, 1863.

\_\_\_\_\_. October 10, 1863.

\_\_\_\_\_. September 14, 1909.

Schuyler, Montgomery. "The Architectural Work of the Late Richard M. Hunt." The Architectural Record, V (October-December, 1895), 97-180.

Scully, Vincent. The Shingle Style. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965.

3. Likely sources not yet investigated:

The Richard Morris Hunt Notebooks and Drawings in the American Institute of Architects Library, Washington, D.C.  
George H. Richardson Notebooks in the Newport Historical Society.

Prepared by Thomas M. Slade  
University of Notre Dame  
Project Historian  
August, 1970

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This early work by the architect, Richard Morris Hunt, is a key example of a major style of domestic architecture in America in the second half of the 19th century. This "Stick Style" house is characterized by open planning, irregular and picturesque massing, deep porches, and richly-articulated wall surfaces with elaborate patterns of half-timbering and bracketing.
2. Condition of fabric: The building is in excellent repair.

### B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: About 100 feet by 60 feet; irregular in plan; two-and-one-half stories.
2. Foundations: Exterior foundation walls are of fieldstone. Interior foundation walls are of brick.
3. Wall construction: The exterior walls are frame with horizontal clapboarding between a pattern of applied half-timbering. There are numerous projecting bays and balconies carried on diagonal braces similar to the half-timber work. The exterior is painted a light gray.
4. Structural system: A frame structural system is employed throughout the building.
5. Chimneys: There are three brick chimneys with stone panel faces. The west chimney is composed of two stacks joined by a brick arch.
6. Openings:
  - a. Doorways: The main entrance is under the porte-cochere on the north side of the house. The original double door has been replaced by a double-glass door. The original four-panelled doors with chamfered woodwork are now the inner doors of the vestibule. The service doors are on the east.

- b. Windows: Most windows are double hung with various shapes and mullion patterns. The design of the windows is carefully fitted into the articulating pattern of the half-timbering which serves as window framing. There is a large, one-and-one-half story studio window composed of 9 x 12 inch panes of glass in the north wall of the northwest bedroom.
7. Roof: The steeply-pitched roofs with numerous gables and occasional hips are covered with gray and red patterned slate. Various kinds of bracketing, bracing, and turned ornamental drops decorate the deep open eaves. There are two small dormers with gable and hipped roofs.
8. Porches, stoops and bulkheads: A one-story porch extends around the west side and part of the south side of the house. The low-pitched porch roof with a curb gutter has bracketed eaves on square posts with chamfered corners and prominent knee braces. The open porte-cochere has a small balcony on its north side which is reached from the stair landing. Two brownstone piers on granite footings support the structure.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plan: The large polygonal hall at the center of the house is five steps above the entrance vestibule. The four major rooms of the first floor are arranged around the central hall. The small, square reception room, now used as the ladies' lounge and restroom, is located at the northeast corner of the house. The parlor, converted for gallery space, is located at the northwest corner. Diagonally from the central hall are located the library to the southwest and the dining room to the southeast. These eight-cornered, rectangular rooms are separated by a square hall on axis with the entrance. This axis terminates in a hexagonal sun room which projects from the south side of the house. This conservatory opens to the library and dining room through its interior diagonal walls. The office is reached through the diagonally-placed door at the southeast corner of the dining room. The door in the northeast corner opens to the remodelled pantry. A long hallway from the central hall leads to the large gallery, formerly the stable, on the east side of the house.
2. Stairways: The U-shaped, open well stairway has a deep landing over the porte-cochere and rises through a two-and-one-half story, open stair hall with a sloped ceiling. The parapet railing has crossed braces and open scrollwork or-

nament. A carved-winged lion sits in front of the square newel post. The railing, newel, and similarly designed wainscoting are of walnut. A stairway of simpler design with turned balusters leads to the third floor from behind the central hall of the second floor. Now enclosed, the third-floor hall originally was open to the stairhall through a balcony. The two lower risers of the entrance hall stairs are decorated with open scrollwork.

3. Flooring: The alternating light and dark wood floors in the hallways and dining room are composed of 3-1/2 inch strips. There is parquet flooring in the principal rooms. The library parquet floor is bordered with an in-laid vine pattern. The bedrooms have wood floors of wide boards.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: The strong articulation of the exterior walls is reflected in the central stairhall by the darkly-stained wood beaming. Most rooms have plaster walls and ceilings with deeply-coved plaster cornices. The walls of the two galleries have been resurfaced with fabric covering for exhibition purposes.
5. Doors and doorways: The four- and six-panelled wood doors are chamfered and set in heavily molded doorways. The door knobs are silver. The left leaf of the double door entering the parlor is false. This false leaf conceals the depth of the wall between the library and parlor. Two pairs of sliding, panelled doors close the library and dining room from the square connecting hall.
6. Special decorative features: Library: The dark-panelled walls are lined with low glass-fronted bookcases. The dark blue plaster ceiling with gold stars has heavy beam work with turned drops at the intersections. The window hoods and molded door caps are supported on twisted colonnettes. The sliding, glass windows extending to the floor have fixed toplights. There are sliding, louvered shutters for the two south windows. The west window bay has panelled and louvered shutters which fold into reveals. Panels with scrollwork of a vine pattern slide to cover the toplights. A high, deep, arched niche tops the low mantel of the fireplace. Panelled pilasters frame a frieze containing four painted plaques of animals and carry the fireplace mantel. The fireplace is faced with slate. The hearth has ceramic tiles in tans, reddish browns, blues, and white. Dining room: The ceiling is decorated with a large hexagonal pattern of deep plaster moldings, similar in profile to the molded plaster ceiling cornices. The panelled wainscoting and other woodwork is stained black. The

double French window bay has fixed toplights and panelled and louvered shutters which fold into reveals. Above the elaborately-carved wood mantelpiece is a mirror which projects from the wall surface. A cast-iron surround frames the fireplace opening. Parlor and reception room: The north window bay of the parlor originally had panelled and louvered shutters which folded into reveals. Two sliding doors with heavy moldings in a decorative arrangement close the window bay. On the west wall is an oriel window bay which has been closed by remodeling. Two doors connecting to the library have been covered. Also closed in the remodeling was the glass window in the fireplace which permitted a view into the library. The north window bay in the reception room retains its panelled and louvered shutters. Entrance vestibule: Flanking the entrance are two small windows with sliding, louvered shutters. Blue, gray, black, red, and yellow tiles in a geometric pattern decorate the floor area before the stairs. Bedrooms: The fireplaces with square or arched openings have wood mantel shelves. Several fireplaces have panel work in the mantel facings. There is blue tile facing on one fireplace. Various styles of sliding and folding panelled and louvered shutters are employed for the upstairs windows.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The house faces west on a large, relatively open, level lot in a predominately residential area.
2. Historic landscape design: The plantings are informal.

Prepared by Osmund Overby  
University of Missouri  
August, 1969

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

Newport HABS Project -- 1969. Sponsored in cooperation with the Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, Antoinette F. Downing, Chairman. Under the direction of James C. Massey, Chief of HABS, and Osmund Overby, (University of Missouri), Project Supervisor, Jack E. Boucher, photographer.

APPENDUM  
FOLLOWS...



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